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ABSTRACT

Many research efforts have focused on the effect of client and counselor sex on the process and outcome of counseling. It was hypothesized that same-sex counselor-client dyads would develop a more open, empathic relationship than would opposite-sex dyads, and that this would be reflected in the number of sessions the counseling dyad spent together. The relationship between client attendance at the first counseling session and sex of the assigned counselor was also investigated. Client subjects were students who sought personal counseling. Preliminary findings did not support the hypothesis. Significant differences in number of counseling sessions between same-sex and opposite-sex counseling dyads were not found; the amount of time the dyad worked together depended more on the type of problem presented by the client than on the sex-pairing of counselor and client. The results support previous findings that neither same- nor opposite-sex pairing is a predictor of counseling process or outcome. No relationship was found between the sex of the counselor and attendance at the first counseling session. These preliminary results suggest that same- or opposite-sex pairings have no appreciable effect on the counseling process as measured by number of sessions. (Author/CS)

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SEX OF COUNSELOR AND SEX OF CLIENT: Preliminary Results

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The present study examined the relationship between sex of client, sex of counselor, client's presenting problem, and the length of time the counseling dyad stayed together. Dyads engaged in personal counseling had significantly more sessions than dyads engaged in vocational counseling or test feedback. Number of counseling sessions was uneffected by the sex pairing of client and counselor. No significant relationship was found between sex of counselor and sex of client not attending the initial counseling appointment.

Sex of Counselor and Sex of Client: Preliminary Results

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There has been much recent interest in the effect of client and counselor sex on the process and outcome of counseling. The women's movement seems to have contributed to this interest, and it is felt that women clients are best seen by women counselors who can understand the problems and concerns of women better than men counselors. In keeping with this position, Shullman and Betz (1979) recently found that intake counselors referred clients to same-sex counselors significantly more often than opposite-sex counselors.

A number of analogue studies have investigated the effects of pairing counselors and clients of the same- and opposite-sex on the counseling process. Daane and Schmidt (1957) found that counselors who were the same sex as their clients showed greater empathy than counselors of the opposite sex. Brooks (1974) found that greater self-disclosure occurred in dyads where one member was female regardless of whether she was the counselor or the client. However, Breisinger (1976), Feldstein (1979), and Petro and Hansen (1977) found no relationship between client-therapist sex pairing and various measures of counseling process and outcome.

Studies of same- and opposite-sex pairings in actual counseling situations have yielded conflicting results. Fuller (1963) found that expression of feelings was facilitated when one member of the dyad was female. Her results also suggested that opposite-sex pairing facilitated self-disclosure. On the other hand, Hill (1975) found that same-sex pairing facilitated disclosure of feelings, and Scher (1975) found no relationship between sex of client and counselor and counseling success. Another study (Collins & Sedlacek, 1974) found that clients of female counselors were more likely not to show up for the first interview than clients of male counselors, but clients of male counselors were more likely to terminate by not showing up for other than the first interview than clients of female counselors.

Feldstein (1979) felt that methodological differences accounted for the discrepant findings of studies investigating the effects of sex pairings on the counseling process. She indicated that those analogue studies which controlled client or counselor behavior (Breisinger, 1976; Feldstein, 1979; Petro & Hansen, 1977) found that sex pairing did not effect counseling while studies in more naturalistic settings found opposite- or same-sex pairings effected counseling. The less controlled

the study, the more likely that behavior which is ordinarily associated with sex (i.e., sex role behavior) will be displayed. This confounding may lead to an erroneous interpretation of the results (i.e., differences due to sex role behavior may be interpreted as differences due to sex).

The present study is a preliminary report of the findings of an ongoing multiyear investigation of the effects of pairing counselors and clients of the same- and opposite-sex on the counseling process. The investigation was conducted in a naturalistic setting, and, therefore, differences between same- and opposite-sex counseling dyads were expected. It was expected that same-sex dyads would develop a more open, empathic relationship than opposite-sex dyads and that this would be reflected in the number of sessions the dyad spent together. It was hypothesized that the facilitation of the same-sex dyad would be most pronounced when the dyad was engaged in personal counseling.

The present study also observed the relationship between client attendance at the first counseling session and sex of assigned counselor. This was done to determine whether the bias found by Collins and Sedlacek (1974) still exists today.

Method

Subjects

Thus far, data have been collected for counseling dyads from the 1978-79 academic year. Client subjects were 228 students (113 men, 115 women) who came to the Counseling Center during the academic year for either personal counseling, vocational counseling, or interpretation of freshmen tests. Eight of the counselors were men and nine of the counselors were women.

An additional 49 students (18 women, 31 men) were scheduled to see a counselor but did not show. These students were subjects for the investigation of the relationship between sex of client and sex of counselor and nonattendance at first counseling session.

Procedure

Students coming to the Counseling Center for individual counseling are requested to indicate the reason for seeking counseling as part of a simple intake form. Students may indicate any of five concerns (educational, vocational, personal, freshmen test feedback, or other). Students are assigned to counselors on the basis of mutual free time.

At the end of the academic year, the intake forms were examined, and clients were classified according to their reason for seeking counseling. Clients who checked only one reason for seeking counseling were chosen for the study. Since few clients requested educational counseling, clients in this category were not used in the study. Clients who requested counseling for reasons other than those listed were also eliminated from the study. Thus, the sample was composed of students who had requested personal counseling (41 women + 44 men = 85 students), vocational counseling (23 women + 24 men = 47 students), or freshmen test feedback (51 women + 45 men = 96 students).

Sex of counselor and sex of client were noted as Type of Dyad (male counselor-male client, female counselor-female client, female counselor-male client, male counselor-female client). The number of counseling sessions was counted for each dyad.

The relationship between sex of student, sex of counselor, and student nonattendance at initial appointment was then investigated. Eighteen women and 31 men were scheduled to see counselors but did not show for the appointments. Each student was aware of the sex of the counselor he or she was scheduled to see. The sex of these students and the sex of the counselors to whom they were assigned were recorded. Type of problem was not recorded due to the small sample size and the fact that some of the students did not correctly indicate their reasons for seeking counseling.

Results

Although data were collected for 228 counseling dyads, the number of dyads representing each type of counseling problem ranged from a high of 28 dyads in the female counselor-female client-freshmen test interpretation category to a low of seven dyads in the male counselor-female client-vocational counseling category. Additional data are being collected to increase the number of dyads in each category and, thus, increase the power of the tests. The present analyses represent a preliminary look at the results.

Results were analyzed via a two-way analysis of variance (Type of Dyad X Type of Problem). A significant main effect for Type of Problem was found (F (2, 216) = 55.07, $p < .001$). More sessions were held for personal counseling (mean = 13.39, standard deviation = 12.98) than for vocational counseling (mean = 1.85, standard deviation = 2.52) or freshmen test feedback (mean = 1.46, standard deviation = .96). The expected interaction between Type of Dyad and Type of Problem was not significant (F (6, 216) = 1.76, $p > .05$).

A log transformation was performed on the data because the means were approximately equal to the standard deviations. An analysis of variance was performed on the transformed data. The results of this analysis were essentially the same as the results of the analysis of variance on the untransformed data (i.e., there was no change in significant and nonsignificant effects).

The relationship between sex of counselor and client and client not showing for the first interview was analyzed via a chi square test. No significant relationship was found between nonattendance at first counseling session, sex of client, and sex of counselor (χ^2(1) =.80, $p > .05$).

Discussion

It was expected that counseling dyads composed of counselors and clients of the same sex would have a more open, empathic relationship than counseling dyads where the counselor and the client were of the opposite sex. It was, therefore, felt that same-sex dyads would have significantly more counseling sessions, particularly when personal counseling was being done, than opposite-sex dyads. The preliminary findings of the present study were not in accord with this hypothesis. While personal counseling did take significantly more sessions than vocational counseling and freshmen test feedback, there were no significant differences in number of counseling sessions between same-sex and opposite-sex counseling dyads. In other words, the amount of time the dyad worked together depended more on the type of problem presented by the client than on the sex pairing of counselor and client.

The present results support previous findings (Breisinger, 1976; Feldstein, 1979; Petro & Hansen, 1977; Scher, 1975) that neither same- nor opposite-sex pairing is a predictor of counseling process or outcome. Feldstein felt that studies which controlled counselor or

client behavior would find that sex pairing does not effect counseling. She felt that studies in more naturalistic settings would find that sex pairing effects counseling because behaviors which are associated with sex would not be controlled and would, therefore, influence counseling. The present study was done in a naturalistic setting, and, contrary to Feldstein's hypothesis, sex pairing did not effect the counseling process. The study by Scher (1975) was also done in a naturalistic setting. He found that client-counselor sex pairing had no effect on the outcome of counseling.

The relationship between sex of client and counselor and client nonattendance at first counseling session was also examined. Collins and Sedlacek (1974) had found that clients of female counselors were more likely not to show up for the first interview than clients of male counselors. The present study found no relationship between counselor sex and client's not showing up for the first interview. Clients who were assigned to male counselors were just as likely not to attend the first interview as clients who were assigned to female counselors.

Data are still being collected to increase the number of subjects in each cell and, thereby, increase the power of the analyses. The present preliminary analyses found no significant relationship between the sexual composition of counseling dyads and the length of their relationship or whether or not the client showed up for the first appointment. At worst, these preliminary results indicate that same- or opposite-sex pairings have no large effect on the counseling process as measured by number of sessions. The addition of more data will make it possible to strengthen this conclusion.

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